The development of fisheries management measures for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland offshore region

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Consultation Document

June 2026

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers
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Ministerial Foreword

Our seas support livelihoods, communities and a vital fishing industry, and it is essential that we are proactive in taking action that protects ecosystems and fish stocks for future generations.

I regularly meet with the fishing industry and recognise the challenges they are navigating on a daily basis, from rising fuel costs to visa restrictions and the impacts of climate change on fish stocks. It is important to acknowledge these realities and to recognise the essential role the fishing industry plays in our coastal economy, cultural heritage and food security.

At the same time, we face an urgent responsibility to halt the decline of marine biodiversity and to meet our international commitment to protect at least 30 per cent of our seas by 2030. This is a necessary step to ensure healthy, productive marine ecosystems that can continue to support fisheries and wider societal benefits over the long term. Provision of clean green energy through offshore renewable energy must be carefully navigated to enable us to garner the opportunities available. Evidence increasingly shows that well-designed and effectively managed protective measures can allow damaged habitats to recover, increase resilience to climate change, and support the replenishment of fish stocks beyond protected areas.

As a result, I am seeking views on proposed fisheries measures for the three Northern Ireland offshore Marine Protected Areas, recognising the importance of your input, whether as individuals or organisations.

Our shared aim is thriving seas that continue to sustain both marine life and the communities that rely upon them.

Contents

Overview of Consultation

Thank you for taking the time to consider this consultation paper. The Department welcomes your views on the introduction of fisheries management measures to safeguard features within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) within the Northern Ireland offshore region.

The consultation will last for 12 weeks, commencing on 1st June 2026.

Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date of 24th August 2026.

What documents should I read to answer the questions?

The relevant information required to respond to the consultation questions is contained within this paper. You may also wish to consider the following information sources:

1. Seafish report (Preliminary economic data extract for the offshore MPAs in Area 7A).
2. Regulatory Impact Assessment.
3. Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
4. Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment.
5. Cefas report (Spatial Squeeze in Northern Irish Waters); and
6. MarESA Assessment.

Link to all the relevant documents and the consultation questions can be found at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-development-fisheries-management-measures-marine-protected-areas-mpas-northern-ireland-offshore-region

Policy assessments

The proposed Fisheries management measures have been subject to an Equality and Human Rights Impact Screening exercise, Regulatory Impact Assessment and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment. These accompanying assessments are available to download from the Department's website.

How to respond

While it is preferred that responses are given via the Citizen Space platform, these can also be submitted via email or post.

- Online at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-development-fisheries-management-measures-marine-protected-areas-mpas-northern-ireland-offshore-region
- By e-mail at: MarineConservation@daera-ni.gov.uk
- By post to: Marine Conservation Branch,
  DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division,
  Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
  Clare House
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When responding please provide the following information:

- Your name;
- Contact details (preferably email);
- Organisation you represent (if applicable); and
- Your main area of interest (e.g. commercial fisheries, marine conservation, aquaculture, tourism & recreation etc.)

This information will assist in the analysis of responses.

Accessibility

Alternative formats can be made available on request in large print, disc, Braille, audio cassette, or text phone for the hearing impaired. The document may also be made available on request in minority ethnic languages to those who are not proficient in English. The Department will translate executive summaries of key publications into Irish or Ulster Scots upon request. Information and additional copies of the document can be requested by text phone on 028 9056 9269.

Freedom of Information (FoI), Confidentiality of Responses and Sharing of Information

DAERA will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. We are unable to reply individually to the points you may raise as part of your reply.

Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request either as an individual response or composite response by category. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and this will provide you with guidance on the legal position about any information submitted by you in response to this consultation.

Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. For more information and to view the DAERA Privacy Statement please go to: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/daera-privacy-statement-document

The FOI Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as

confidential, information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response including any harm you believe such a disclosure might cause.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the FOI Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided.
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature, acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office or visit the ICO Website.

Rationale

The seas around Northern Ireland host a wide variety of marine wildlife and contain rich and varied habitats that support a diverse abundance of living organisms. As an island-based society, the sea has always had an important role to play, offering a source of food, recreation and a place of work to many.

Fishing makes an important contribution to the Northern Ireland economy, particularly coastal communities. In 2024, there were 190 active fishing vessels in Northern Ireland, supporting 408 full time equivalents jobs in 2024[1]. Fish landings into Northern Ireland in 2024 were 50,886 tonnes, with a value of approximately £75 million. Indirectly, commercial fishing supports a variety of other jobs, such as seafood processing, ancillary engineering and service industries, supporting 562 full time equivalents (2023)[2].

Sea fisheries management is devolved and DAERA has responsibility for the management of fishing in the Northern Ireland zone, which encompasses both the inshore and offshore regions.

The Northern Ireland offshore region supports diverse fishing opportunities that make an important contribution to the economies of coastal communities. The introduction of fisheries management measures outlined in this consultation document are intended to support fishing at sustainable levels while also protecting the marine environment. This is consistent with the implementation of an ecosystem approach to marine planning as set out in the UK Marine Policy Statement[3]. The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland includes objectives to:

- promote marine recovery to ensure a healthy, resilient and adaptable marine ecosystem with an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas.
- contribute towards climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Marine protection also needs to evolve to protect habitats that capture carbon in the offshore region, such as subtidal mud habitats. Effective management of activities that impact on

[1] Seafish Fleet Enquiry Tool
[2] Seafish Processing Enquiry Tool
[3] The UK Marine Policy Statement

marine habitats and ecosystem functions are required to ensure sustainable exploitation of natural marine resources and contribute to mitigation against climate change.

Development of fisheries management measures for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Introduction

Well managed Marine Protected Area (MPA) networks are recognised internationally as one of the ways of protecting our marine environment and international commitments have been made accordingly. The UN Sustainable Development Goals [4](SDG) are the blueprint to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all, specifically SDG 14 to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development"

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) 2021-2030[5] is an overarching framework on biodiversity for the entire United Nations system and was adopted in December 2022.

The CBD Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework lays out 23 action-based targets for 2030. Targets of particular relevance are:

- TARGET 1: Plan and Manage all Areas to Reduce Biodiversity Loss
- TARGET 3: Conserve 30% of Land, Waters and Seas

This highlights a global progression from designating areas for protection to ensuring those areas are effectively managed for protecting and restoring nature, while recognising that some sustainable activities may occur within a protected site, but that these should be consistent with the site's conservation objectives.

DAERA has already designated 48 MPAs in the Northern Ireland inshore region. In addition, Defra has designated a further three MPAs in the offshore, for which the Defra Secretary of State has responsibility. In total, 35.5% of the Northern Ireland marine area[6] is designated for protection and 8.44% fully protected from mobile bottom towed fishing.

The Northern Ireland offshore MPA network is made up of two types of designations:

[4] The UN Sustainable Development Goals
[5] Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)
[6] Review and Evaluation of the Marine Protected Area networks in England and Northern Ireland (OEP)

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) – designated under the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017[7] for habitats of European importance, such as reefs, mudflats and sandbanks. The conservation objectives of offshore SACs are for the features to be in favourable condition thus ensuring site integrity in the long term. There is one SAC - Pisces Reef Complex SAC[8].

- Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) – designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009[9] to protect rare, threatened or nationally important marine habitats, species and geological features. The conservation objectives of offshore MCZs are that the protected features, (1) so far as already in favourable condition, remain in such condition; and (2) so far as not already in favourable condition, be brought into such condition, and remain in such condition. There are two MCZs – South Rigg MCZ[10] and Queenie Corner MCZ[11].

During the designation phase of these offshore sites, the local fishing industry contributed by identifying important areas for fishing and participating in boundary setting discussions. The MPA boundaries were set to protect the feature of interest while ensuring there were no unnecessary restrictions on activities such as fishing. However, since designation, the fishing industry has faced a series of displacement impacts from offshore wind infrastructure, closures of neighbouring waters e.g. Isle of Man, and fishing restrictions following the UK departure from the EU. The Department recognises that displacement of fishing activity may have negative social, economic and environmental impacts, and will work with all sea users, including the fishing industry, to identify and seek to address these displacement issues. The Department will also continue to engage with the fishing industry, both directly and indirectly through the Co-Fish partnership to explore potential management options.

[7] The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
[8] Pisces Reef Complex SAC Conservation Objectives
[9] Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009
[10] South Rigg MCZ Conservation Objectives
[11] Queenie Corner MCZ Conservation Objectives

A map of Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland offshore region is displayed in Figure 1 below.

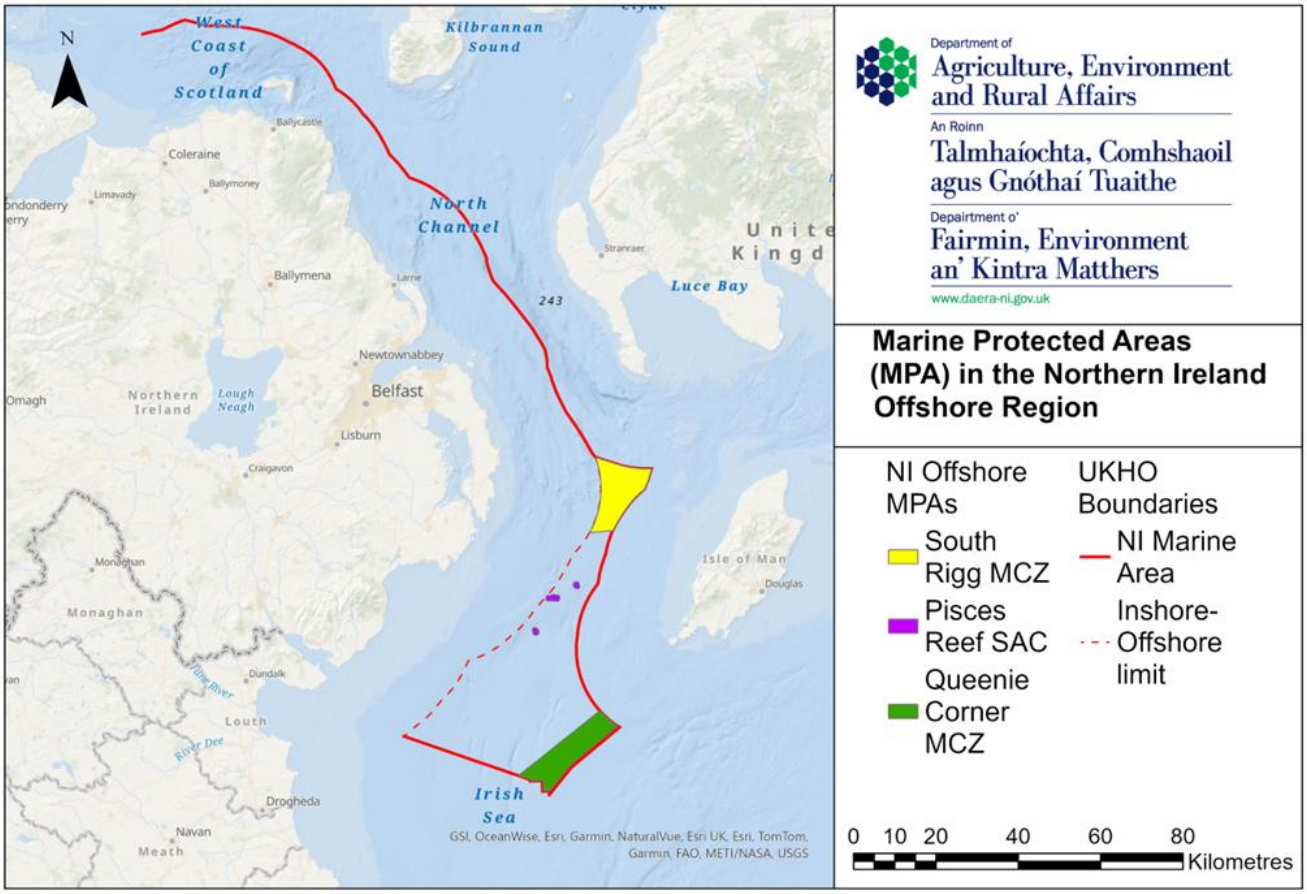

Figure 1: Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland Offshore Region.

Responsibilities for management of the NI marine area

The Northern Ireland marine area forms part of the broader UK marine area and is divided into two distinct regions: the inshore region, which extends up to 12 nautical miles from the coast, and the offshore region, which lies beyond this boundary.

Policy and regulatory functions relating to the Northern Ireland marine area are a combination of reserved and devolved responsibilities as outlined below.

DAERA is responsible for:

- Marine environment policy and regulatory functions in the Northern Ireland inshore region.

- Designation and management of MPAs in the inshore region.
- Regulation of fishing in the Northern Ireland marine area, which includes ensuring that that fishing activities are managed to enable MPAs achieve their conservation objectives and to maintain the ecological coherence of the network e.g. fisheries management measures introduced in 2022[12].
- DAERA is also the marine plan authority for the Northern Ireland marine area.

The Secretary of State (Defra) is responsible for:

- Marine environment policy and regulatory functions in the Northern Ireland offshore region; and
- Defra has designated three MPAs in the Northern Ireland offshore region.

JNCC is responsible for:

- Establishing conservation objectives and providing conservation advice for MPAs in the Northern Ireland offshore region.

What legal protection applies under these designations?

The UK is legally required to take measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) for our seas, and to do this through development and implementation of a UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) as set out in the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010[13]. DAERA has a duty to work with Defra and the other devolved governments to develop measures for achieving GES.

The UK is also a contracting party to the Oslo-Paris Commission (OSPAR)[14] and has committed to developing a network of marine protected areas that covers at least 30% of its marine area to ensure the conservation objectives are achieved through effective management. The MPA network is an integral part of the programme of measures for achieving GES.

[12] The Marine Protected Areas (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022
[13] The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010
[14] OSPAR Commission

Offshore Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated through the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)[15]. The Department, through regulations 6 and 25, is required to exercise its functions so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the regulation. To fulfil this duty the Department must establish the necessary management measures to ensure the conservation objectives of the qualifying features are achieved.

In the Northern Ireland offshore region, Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009)[16] and the Department is required to exercise its functions in a manner which best furthers the conservation objectives of the MCZ.

Why are fisheries management measures required?

Fisheries management measures can be introduced using regulatory powers under section 137E of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which provides for the regulation of fishing for the purposes of conserving marine habitats and species. The latest assessments from JNCC advise that the majority of features in the Northern Ireland offshore network are in unfavourable condition[17/18/19]. Similarly, recent assessments for both the UK Marine Strategy[20] and Habitats Regulations[21] have identified that overall, benthic habitats are still not reaching the required environmental status, with physical damage from bottom trawling highlighted as the main pressure to features such as Annex 1 Offshore Reefs[22]. In 2023, OSPAR also reported that seabed disturbance from fishing activity was greatest in areas of offshore circalittoral mud, and Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities[23].

Fisheries regulations have already been introduced for the Northern Ireland inshore MPA network and surveys have shown evidence that the benthic habitats are recovering in these

[15] Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
[16] Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009)
[17] Pisces Reef Conservation Advice Statements
[18] South Rigg MPA: Conservation Objectives and Management Advice
[19] Queenie Corner Conservation Advice Statements
[20] Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status Consultation document
[21] Habitats Regulations report 2019-2024
[22] Offshore Reef - Habitats Directive Article 17 2019
[23] OSPAR Quality Status Reports 2023

areas. For example, at Rathlin Island, divers have observed that sensitive taxa, including sponges, bryozoans and anemones, are recovering since the use of towed demersal fishing gear was prohibited in the SAC[24]. Similarly, surveys from the 2019 MPA condition assessment have found that Horse mussel beds (*Modiolus modiolus*) in Strangford Lough were showing signs of recovery following the removal of physical pressure from the area[25].

Our offshore MPAs contain important fishing areas that are valuable to coastal communities, and this consultation sets out management options that the Department considers are necessary to ensure it meets all duties and obligations that relate to this activity. The Global Biodiversity Framework aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and ensure 30% of land and sea is effectively managed for nature. The introduction of these management measures will contribute to this target as well as the Programme for Government (PfG)[26] priority to protect the environment, and the Environmental Improvement Plan[27] (EIP) Strategic Environmental Outcome 11: protecting nature at sea, by increasing the amount of protected areas under effective management. Developing and publishing management measures for NI Offshore MPAs in partnership with stakeholders is a key target of the EIP.

This consultation proposes fisheries management measures for the following MPAs:

- Pisces Reef Complex SAC
- South Rigg MCZ
- Queenie Corner MCZ

Formulation of management options

The management options for each MPA were developed using the approach set out in the Department's Guidance on the Development of Conservation Objectives and Potential Management Options[28]. This approach applied the Marine Evidence-based Sensitivity

[24] Rathlin Island Dive Expedition 2019
[25] Strangford Lough subtidal SAC Condition Assessment 2019
[26] Programme for Government 2024-2027
[27] Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland
[28] Guidance on the Development of Conservation Objectives and Potential Management Options

Assessment (MarESA) [29] methodology to evaluate the risk of damage posed by human activities to vulnerable marine features.

In order to undertake this assessment, the level of commercial fishing activities known to occur within MPAs in the Northern Ireland offshore region was assessed for demersal mobile gear (trawling and dredging) fishing using information from the following sources:

- Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) data
- OSPAR Benthic Habitat (BH3) Indicator[30]
- Fisheries landing data
- Local information provided by DAERA and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Expert opinion and knowledge from Seafish/Cefas regarding socio-economic assessment

It is recognised there are some gaps in our knowledge, as sensitivity assessments were not available for all habitat data recorded within the MPAs considered. Where habitat data were lacking, JNCC Advice on Operations and peer-reviewed literature were used to guide interpretations of MPA feature vulnerability to fishing activity. The majority of vessels operating in the offshore region fall in the >12m class, for which Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data were available (Table 1). These data record the vessels heading and speed at intervals of two hours. Fishing was deemed to be occurring when a vessel speed was logged between 0.5-4.5 knots[31], providing a reliable indication of fishing activity within the offshore MPAs.

[29] Marine Evidence based Sensitivity Assessment (MarESA)
[30] Extent of Physical Disturbance to Benthic Habitats: Fisheries with mobile bottom-contacting gears
[31] Alternative Marine Conservation Zones in Irish Sea mud habitat: Assessment of habitat extent and condition at “Queenie corner” and assessment of fishing activity at potential MCZ sites.

Table 1: Number of >12m vessels operating in the ICES VIIa region each year between 2014-2023, broken down by UK (NI portion of UK) and Non-UK registrations.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
UK (NI)	334 (158)	322 (164)	321 (154)	288 (152)	263 (134)	254 (126)	219 (105)	202 (102)	180 (98)	174 (91)
Non-UK	18	27	26	22	21	60	67	59	50	46

'Risk' of damage or disturbance to designated features was assessed against the current management of fishing activity as follows:

- High risk activities are those for which the feature has a high vulnerability, and there is inadequate or no management mechanism for that location.
- Moderate risk activities are those for which the feature has a low or moderate vulnerability, and there is inadequate or no management mechanism for that location.
- Low risk activities are those where there is low feature vulnerability (i.e. the activity does not adversely impact the feature) or where the moderate-high vulnerability is mitigated by existing management mechanisms.

From this, three levels of management were considered in each MPA:

1. **Full closure** - Management would be introduced to remove or avoid pressures, i.e. activities would be prohibited within the MPA. This management measure would be considered when the feature vulnerability is moderate or high.
2. **Partial closure** - Management would be introduced to reduce or limit pressures i.e. certain activities will be allowed within the MPA, but this will be subject to certain additional management measures (e.g. modification of methodologies used, effort limitation, partial site closure etc). This management measure would be considered when the feature vulnerability is moderate or low.

3. **No closure** - No additional management required i.e. no restrictions in place other than general regulations (quotas, technical measures, etc.) that are not site specific.

The aim of these management measures is to enable the achievement of favourable conservation status of the protected features in each MPA, and this will contribute to the delivery of Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy.

The management options are specifically tailored for each MPA. For MPAs where there is only one management option recommended, this is because the MPA boundary encompasses the qualifying feature(s) only and no non-feature habitat is present, or the size of the MPA is only suitable for a single management option. Where alternative management options are provided, the Department has presented a risk-based option where some features of the site would be protected but would still result in unfavourable condition under a 'one out, all out' approach at a feature level, as advised by JNCC. The Department seeks to implement the best option that could deliver wider ecosystem benefits, including benefits to fish stocks.

In exploring potential options, the Department looked at options taken by other countries. The Scottish Government sought advice from both the Chief Scientific Marine Advisor and JNCC and decided to implement a partial closure of 67% of mud features in some Scottish offshore MPAs, with 33% of mud available to be fished. After reviewing this decision, DAERA are considering an alternative option of a partial closure where 33% of mud will be available to fishing in both Queenie Corner MCZ and South Rigg MCZ.[32]

The options presented are management measures that have been identified as necessary following the completion of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Marine Conservation Zone assessment. The following options were considered for management of demersal mobile gear fishing:

- Option 1: Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the entire site permanently.
- Option 2: Prohibition of demersal mobile throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat in MCZs.
- Option 3: No prohibition of gear, only statutory monitoring to continue.

[32] Offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): proposed fisheries management measures advice notes (Scotland)

How measures would be implemented

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, under Section 137E, provides that the Department may make one or more orders relating to the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the Northern Ireland offshore region for the purposes of conserving marine flora, fauna, habitats and/or geological features. Any measures to give effect to the proposed fisheries management measures agreed as a consequence or outworking of this consultation exercise would be legislated for under these powers.

Once implemented, the management measures will be kept under review as part of an adaptive management framework which will include both a scientific programme to assess the effectiveness of the management measures and a compliance and enforcement programme. Co-fish: NI Fisheries and Conservation Partnership will continue to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to participate in the development and implementation of these management measures.

The Department currently supports a science partnership for commercial fisheries, and as part of this, the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) provides advice on sustainable catch levels of stocks, including *Nephrops*[33], utilising information from fisheries surveys, fleet observer programmes and self-sampling schemes. It has been identified that enhanced data collection from the commercial fisheries which target these species would also be highly beneficial and it is envisaged that the Department will make additional funding available through the Marine Environment and Fisheries Fund (MEFF) [34] to assist with this.

Increased data collection would not only improve assessment of this stock but also contributes to the monitoring of closed areas and MPAs, and their ability to act as reserves for important fish stocks to support more productive fisheries. This data collection would also support projects to look at wider ecosystem function for both commercial stocks and the productivity of the entire marine zone in our waters and further afield.

[33] AFBI Fisheries Independent Surveys
[34] Marine Environment and Fisheries Fund

Proposed fisheries management measures for MPAs

The following sections provide details of the designated features, conservation objectives, and current condition status for each MPA, along with the different management options and the Department's preferred option. Where possible, the value of loss of fishing opportunities has been provided. These economic appraisals are based on information provided by an independent assessment carried out by Sea Fish[35], Cefas and the BEACH tool from the NI Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA) project[36].

Pisces Reef Complex Special Area of Conservation

The Pisces Reef Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located in the western Irish Sea, in the north-west mud basin. It is approximately midway between Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. This site has been designated because it affords protection to two subtypes of Annex I Reefs: Bedrock reef and Stony reef in the deep circalittoral zone. The Pisces Reef Complex comprises three separate areas of reef which protrude from an extensive mud plain. The reefs support a diverse community which is characteristic of low energy circalittoral rock. It also includes encrusting species such as sponges and sea squirts, and crustaceans including the squat lobster as well as fish species.

The site has been designated for the following qualifying features:

- Annex 1 bedrock and boulder dominated stony reef.

Figure A1 in Annex A displays a habitat map of Pisces Reef Complex SAC and Table 2 below outlines the qualifying features, conservation objectives and most recent condition status. Further detail on the Pisces Reef Complex SAC can be found at: https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/pisces-reef-complex-mpa/

[35] Consultation page- development of fisheries management measures for offshore MPAs
[36] An Assessment of Northern Ireland's Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA)

Table 2: Pisces Reef Complex SAC features, conservation objectives and current condition status.

Qualifying Feature	Conservation objective	Condition status
Annex 1 Reefs	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)

Demersal mobile gear - management option

There is a low to medium level of fishing activity at this site, with designated reef features having a moderate to high sensitivity to demersal mobile gear fishing pressures, resulting in a moderate to high level of risk.

A summary of the management options for consideration is provided in Table 3 below. Full details of the level of risk associated with demersal mobile gear (Table B1) and the action advised can be found in Annex B.

The management option (Option 1) proposed for Pisces Reef Complex SAC is to remove risks associated with fishing using demersal mobile gear by prohibiting this gear type within the SAC boundary. This would result in a prohibition of mobile bottom towed gear throughout the SAC which would promote the unfavourable condition status to unfavourable recovering. The Department considers this necessary to protect the designated features of the site, as well as recognising the increased ecological benefits that total closure of the MPA would bring[37].

Option 2 would result in no management measures being applied in the SAC. Fishing will continue throughout the site, and only statutory monitoring of protected features would take place where the status will be reported on every six years.

[37] Before–after control–impact (BACI) assessment of the effects of a deep-water no-take fishery reserve to recover Norway lobster (Nephrops norvegicus) overfished populations and coexisting megafauna

Table 3: Proposed options for Pisces Reef Complex SAC.

Fishing Type	Option
Demersal mobile	1. Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire SAC (Figure 2)
	2. Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue.

Option 1 is the preferred management proposal. This proposal is estimated to impact £40,000 of Northern Ireland landings (revenue) per year, with an equivalent annual loss of fishing opportunity in terms of operating profit of approximately £8,000 per year from this MPA (Table 4). There are no other countries that fish in this area, so total value of the site has been attributed to the Northern Ireland fleet. Pisces Reef Complex SAC accounts for 0.09% of landed quota weight for the Irish Sea demersal catch, and 0.11% of demersal quota value from the Irish Sea. The value lost from a full closure is considered to be low, in comparison to the ecosystem benefits total closure will bring. These benefits include a reduction in risk of physical damage to the seabed and reduced smothering of the reef assemblage. This will ensure the site conservation objectives will be met and may also help fish stocks outside the SAC.

To assess the economic benefits from this management option, the Net Present Value (NPV) for Pisces Reef Complex SAC was calculated using the BEACH tool from the NI Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA) project[38]. NPV is a commonly used economic tool that helps estimate the overall value of benefits and costs that will occur in the future. It converts these future benefits and costs into today's terms so they can be compared more easily. When used to assess natural capital assets, NPV can take into account benefits to people and society, as well as benefits to the environment and ecosystems. As of 2019, the NPV for this site was £100,000, rising to an estimated value of £1.87m following a 20-year recovery period (Table 5). Please see Regulatory Impact Assessment document for more information and associated caveats of this assessment.

[38] An Assessment of Northern Ireland's Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA)

Table 4: Economic summary of landings and revenue under different management options for Pisces Reef Complex SAC. Landings and profit have been calculated as a 10-year average between 2014-2023.

Management option	Summary	Average annual value of landings from SAC	Average annual value of fishing opportunity loss (Operating profit)
Option 1	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire SAC	£40,000	-£8,000
Option 2	Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue	£40,000	£0

Table 5: Economic summary of marine natural capital under different management options for Pisces Reef Complex SAC. The Net Present Value (NPV) of Pisces Reef Complex SAC, both as of 2019 and over the next 20 years has also been included to highlight the benefit of these management options.

Management option	Summary	Net Present Value	Net Present Value (20-yr)	Natural Capital increase due to management
Option 1	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire SAC	£100,000	£1.87m	+£0.49m
Option 2	Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue	£100,000	£1.38m	£0

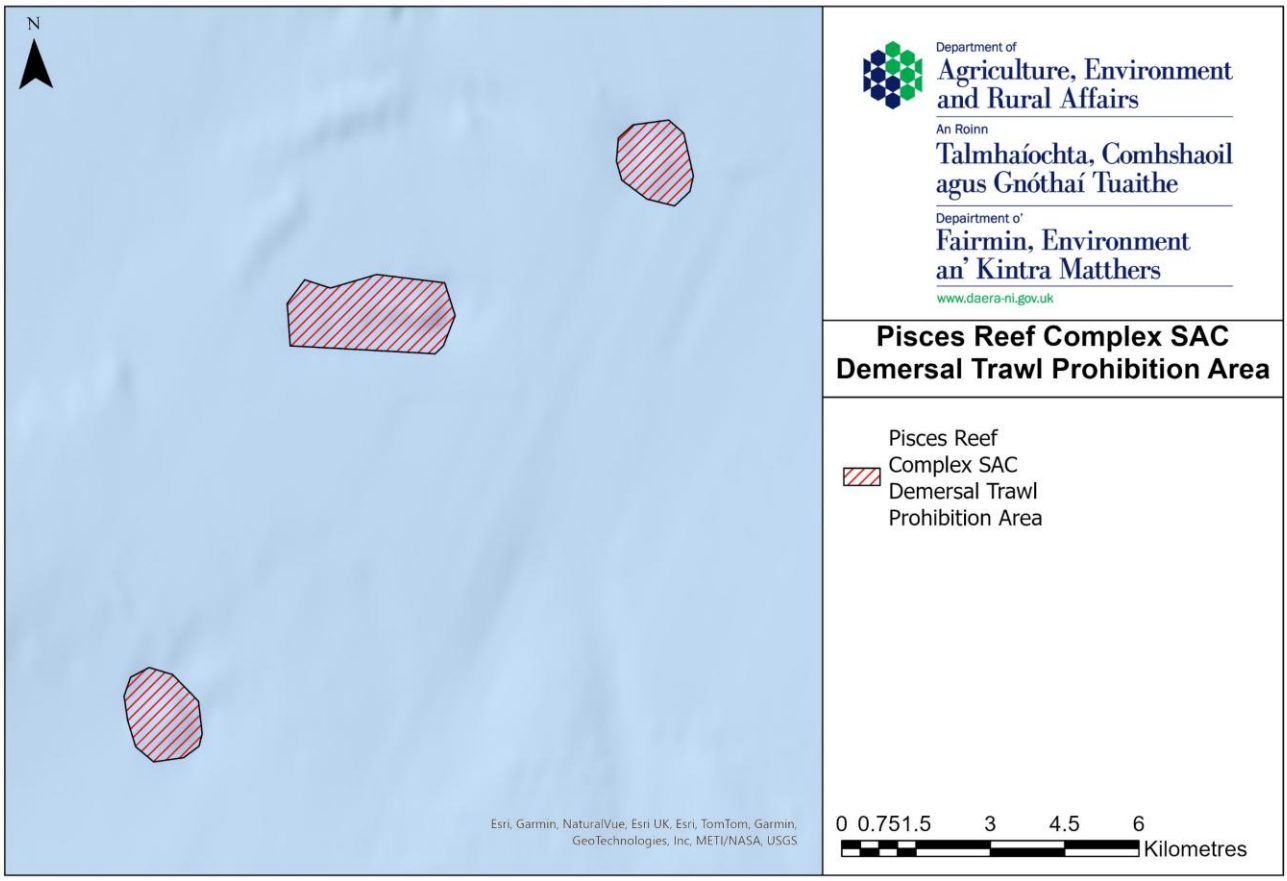

Figure 2: Map of the proposed demersal trawl prohibition zone at Pisces Reef Complex SAC.

Consultation questions

Questions relating to Pisces Reef Complex SAC are summarised below:

1.1. Do you agree with the recommended option of a full closure?

1.2. Do you agree with the assessment of the current value of fishing within Pisces Reef Complex SAC?

1.3. Is there any further evidence that should be considered in terms of values, costs or benefits?

To respond to these questions please see online response form.

South Rigg Marine Conservation Zone

The site is located in the west of the Irish Sea region, approximately 23 km west of the Isle of Man. The seabed is predominately mud and sand with areas of coarse and mixed sediments, as well as rocky habitats.

South Rigg MCZ has been designated for the following features:

- Moderate energy circalittoral rock
- Subtidal coarse sediment
- Subtidal sand
- Subtidal mud
- Subtidal mixed sediment
- Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities

Further detail on South Rigg MCZ can be found at:

https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/south-rigg-mpa/

Figure A2 in Annex A displays a habitat map of South Rigg MCZ and Table 6 outlines the qualifying marine features, conservation objectives and most recent condition status.

Table 6: South Rigg MCZ features, conservation objectives and current condition status.

Qualifying Feature	Conservation objective	Condition status
Moderate energy circalittoral rock	Maintain	Favourable (2025)
Subtidal coarse sediment	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)
Subtidal sand	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)
Subtidal mud	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)
Subtidal mixed sediment	Maintain	Favourable (2025)

Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)

Demersal mobile gear - management options

The level of fishing with demersal mobile gear within South Rigg MCZ varies across the different habitat features. The designated features of subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal sand, subtidal mud, and sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities are highly sensitive to pressures associated with demersal mobile gear and are considered to be at high risk of damage. The moderate energy circalittoral rock and subtidal mixed sediments are also sensitive to demersal mobile gear and are considered to be at moderate risk from pressure.

A summary of the management options for consideration is provided in Table 7 below and a map is presented in Figure 3 and 4. Full details of the level of risk associated with demersal mobile gear (Table B3) and the action advised can be found in Annex B.

Option 1 seeks to mitigate this pressure by fully removing it from within the MCZ boundary. This would result in a prohibition of mobile bottom towed gear throughout the MCZ which would promote the unfavourable condition status to unfavourable recovering.

Option 2 also seeks to mitigate fishing pressure from sensitive features; however, this will only be applicable to 67% of available mud habitat, with all other protected habitats being subject to a full prohibition of mobile bottom towed gear. The Department has proposed a balance between permitting a level of risk to the protected features, whilst also allowing for a reduced level of fishing to continue in 33% of the available mud habitat which represents the area where the main *Nephrops* fishery operates. The area proposed to remain open to fishing has been identified using VMS data, where the southern end of the MCZ is deemed to be of significant value to the industry. This approach is in line with zonal measures introduced in Scottish MPAs for protected mud habitats.

Option 3 would result in no management measures being applied in the MCZ. Fishing will continue throughout the site, and only statutory monitoring of protected features would take place where the status will be reported on every six years.

Table 7: Proposed options for South Rigg MCZ.

Fishing Type	Option
Demersal (mobile)	1. Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire MCZ. (Figure 3).
	2. Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat (Figure 4).
	3. Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue.

Option 1 is the preferred management proposal. This proposal is estimated to impact £279,000 of UK landings (revenue) per year, with an equivalent annual loss of fishing opportunity in terms of operating profit of approximately £48,000 per year from this MPA (Table 8). South Rigg MCZ accounts for 0.59% of landed quota weight for the Irish Sea demersal catch, and 0.76% of demersal quota value from the Irish Sea. The value lost is considered to be low, in comparison to the ecosystem benefits total closure will bring. These benefits include a reduction in risk of physical damage to the seabed and reduced smothering of the reef assemblage. This will ensure the site conservation objectives are met and may also help fish stocks outside the MCZ.

To assess the economic benefits from this management option, the Net Present Value (NPV) for South Rigg MCZ was calculated using the BEACH tool from the NI Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA) project[39]. NPV is a commonly used economic tool that helps estimate the overall value of benefits and costs that will occur in the future. It converts these future benefits and costs into today's terms so they can be compared more easily. When used to assess natural capital assets, NPV can take into account benefits to people and society, as well as benefits to the environment and ecosystems. As of 2019, the NPV for this site was £1.48 million, rising to an estimated value of £28.87 million following a 20-year recovery period (Table 9). Please see Regulatory Impact Assessment document for more information and associated caveats of this assessment.

[39] An Assessment of Northern Ireland's Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA)

Table 8: Economic summary of landings and revenue under different management options for South Rigg MCZ. Landings and profit have been calculated as a 10-year average between 2014-2023.

Management option	Summary	Average annual value of landings from MCZ	Average annual value of fishing opportunity loss (Operating profit)
Option 1	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire MCZ.	£279,000	-£48,000
Option 2	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat	£279,000	-£39,000
Option 3	Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue	£279,000	£0

Table 9: Economic summary of marine natural capital under different management options for South Rigg MCZ. The Net Present Value (NPV) of South Rigg MCZ, both as of 2019 and over the next 20 years has also been included to highlight the benefit of these management options.

Management option	Summary	Net Present Value	Net Present Value (20-yr)	Natural Capital increase due to management
Option 1	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire MCZ.	£1.48m	£28.87m	+£7.49m
Option 2	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat	£1.48m	£24.07m	+£2.69m
Option 3	Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue	£1.48m	£21.38m	£0

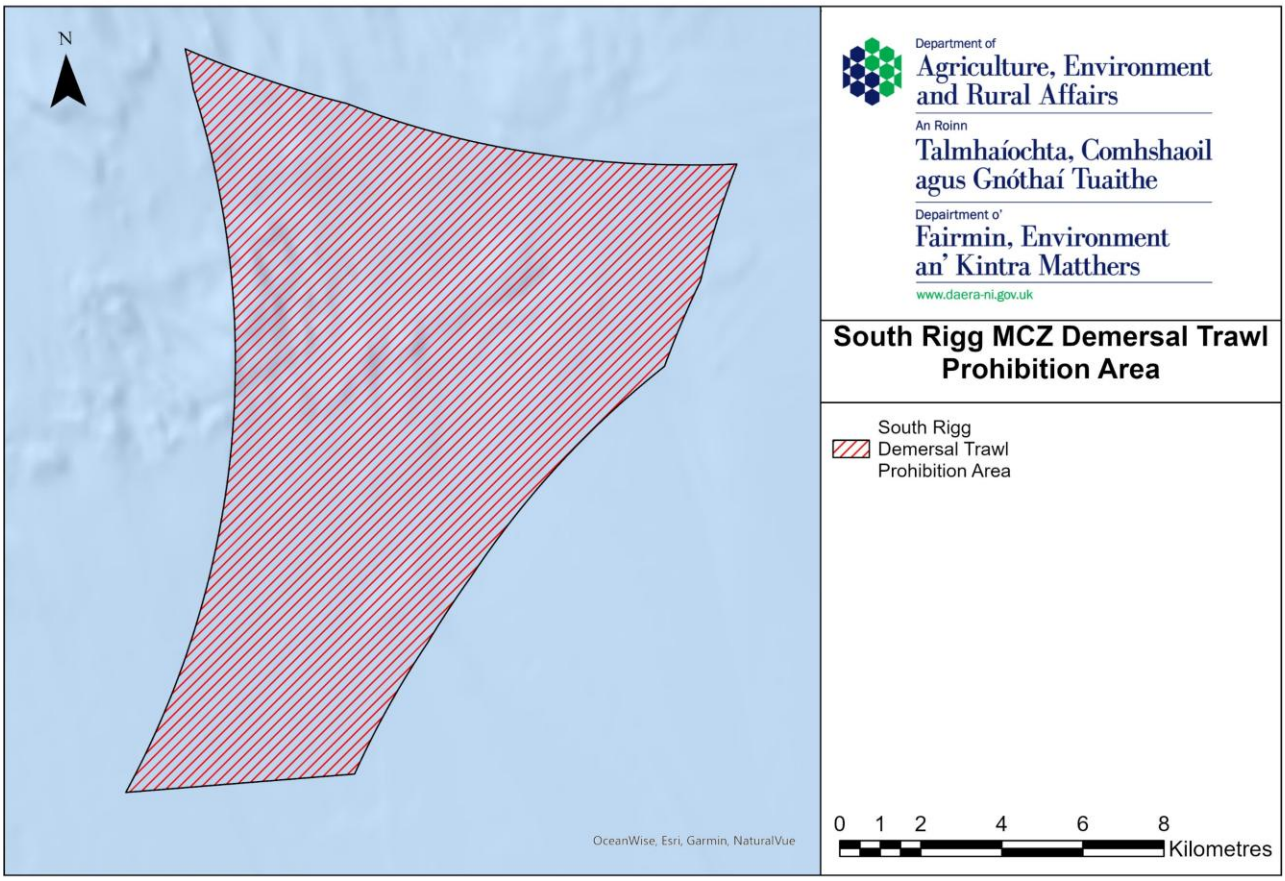

Figure 3: Option 1- Map of the proposed demersal trawl prohibition zone at South Rigg MCZ.

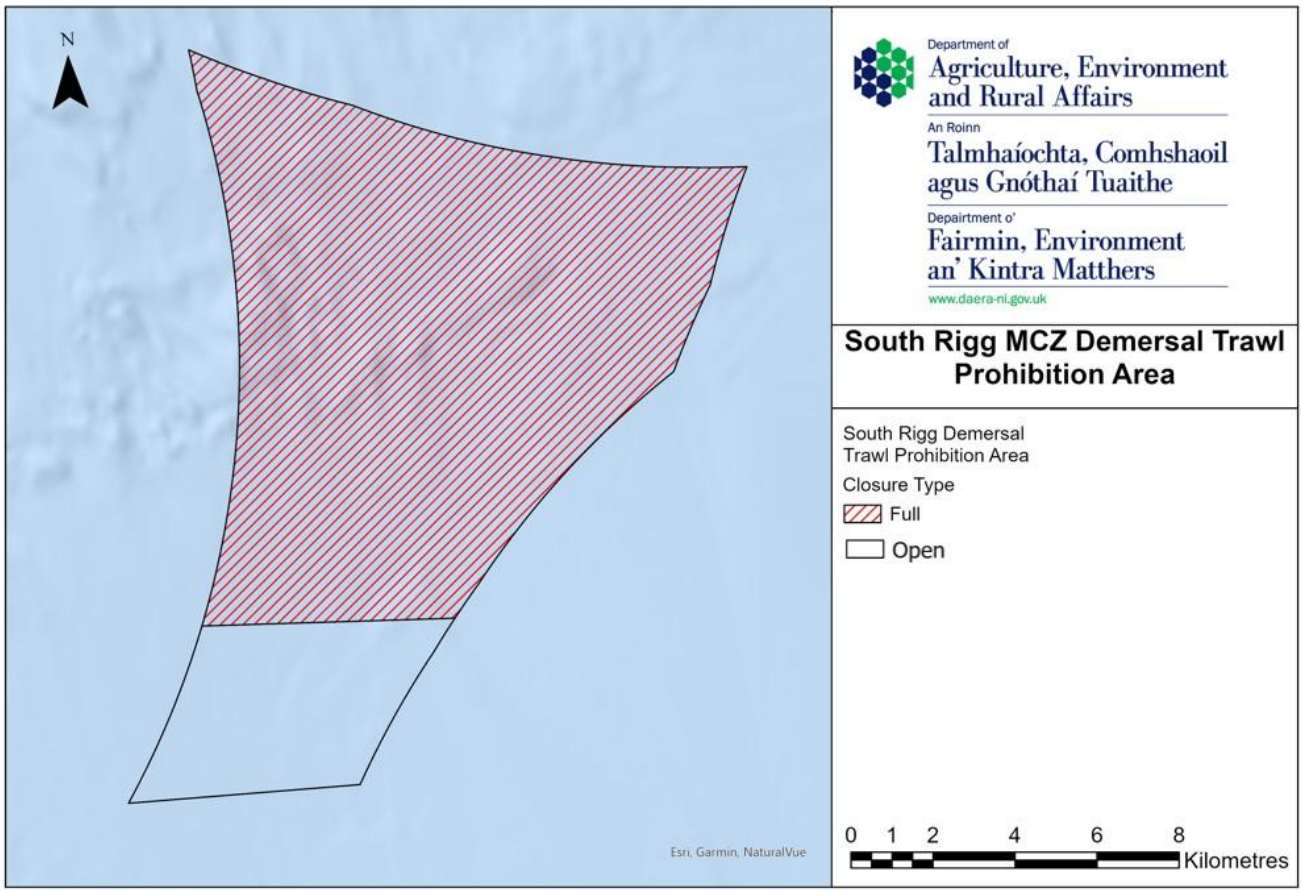

Figure 4: Option 2- Map of the proposed zonal demersal trawl prohibition zone at South Rigg MCZ.

Consultation questions

Questions relating to South Rigg MCZ are summarised below:

1.4. Do you agree with the recommended option of a full closure? If not, what is your preferred option?

1.5. Do you agree with the assessment of the current value of fishing within South Rigg MCZ?

1.6. Is there any further evidence that should be considered in terms of values, costs or benefits?

To respond to these questions please see online response form.

Queenie Corner Marine Conservation Zone

Queenie Corner MCZ is located in the western part of the Irish Sea. The seabed is dominated by mud habitat and sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities.

Queenie Corner MCZ has been designated for the following features:

- Subtidal mud
- Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities

Further detail on Queenie Corner MCZ can be found at:
https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/queenie-corner-mpa/

Figure A3 in Annex A displays a habitat map of Queenie Corner MCZ and Table 10 outlines the qualifying marine features, conservation objectives and most recent condition status.

Table 10: Queenie Corner MCZ features, conservation objective and current condition status.

Qualifying Feature	Conservation objective	Condition status
Subtidal mud	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)
Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities	Recover	Unfavourable (2025)

Demersal mobile gear - management options

Analysis of fishing pressure data within the Queenie Corner MCZ is indicates there is a medium level of demersal fishing activity taking place. The designated features of subtidal mud habitat and sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities are highly sensitive to demersal mobile gear fishing pressures, which results in a high level of risk.

A summary of the management options for consideration is provided in Table 11 below and a maps are presented in Figure 5 and 6. Full details of the level of risk associated with demersal mobile gear (Table B3) and the action advised can be found in Annex B.

Option 1 seeks to mitigate this pressure by fully removing it from within the MCZ boundary. This would result in a prohibition of mobile bottom towed gear throughout the MCZ which would promote the unfavourable condition status to unfavourable recovering.

Option 2 seeks to also mitigate fishing pressure from sensitive features; however, this will only be applicable to 67% of the site. The Department has proposed a balance between permitting a level of risk to the protected features, whilst also allowing for a reduced level of fishing to continue in 33% of site. The area proposed to remain open to fishing has been decided based upon: (1) it is the closest part of the MCZ to NI and therefore will incur the least amount of fuel to reach and, (2) the remaining 67% is logistically more feasible to manage given the clear site boundaries. This approach is in line with zonal measures introduced in Scottish MPAs for protected mud habitats.

Option 3 would result in no management measures being applied in the MCZ. Fishing will continue throughout the site, and only statutory monitoring of protected features would take place where the status will be reported on every six years.

Table 11: Proposed options for Queenie Corner MCZ.

Fishing Type	Option
Demersal	1. Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire MCZ (Figure 5).
	2. Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat (Figure 6).
	3. Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue.

Option 1 is the preferred management proposal. This proposal is estimated to impact approximately £310,000 of UK landings (revenue) per year, with an equivalent annual loss of fishing opportunity in terms of operating profit of approximately £64,000 per year from this MPA (Table 12). Queenie Corner MCZ accounts for 0.66% of landed quota weight for the Irish Sea demersal catch, and 0.84% of demersal quota value from the Irish Sea. The value

lost is considered to be low, in comparison to the ecosystem benefits total closure will bring. These benefits include a reduction in risk of physical damage to the seabed and reduced pressure on sensitive species such as sea pens. This will ensure the site conservation objectives are met and may also help fish stocks outside the MCZ.

To assess the economic benefits from this management option, the Net Present Value (NPV) for Queenie Corner MCZ was calculated using the BEACH tool from the NI Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA) project[40]. NPV is a commonly used economic tool that helps estimate the overall value of benefits and costs that will occur in the future. It converts these future benefits and costs into today's terms so they can be compared more easily. When used to assess natural capital assets, NPV can take into account benefits to people and society, as well as benefits to the environment and ecosystems. As of 2019, the NPV for this site was £1.6 million, rising to an estimated value of £31.39 million following a 20-year recovery period (Table 13). Please see Regulatory Impact Assessment document for more information and associated caveats of this assessment.

[40] An Assessment of Northern Ireland's Marine Natural Capital (NI-MANACA)

Table 12: Economic summary of landings and revenue under different management options for Queenie Corner MCZ. Landings and profit have been calculated as a 10-year average between 2014-2023.

Management option	Summary	Average annual value of landings from MCZ	Average annual value of fishing opportunity loss (Operating profit)
Option 1	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire MCZ.	£310,000	-£64,000
Option 2	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat	£310,000	-£43,000
Option 3	Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue.	£310,000	£0

Table 13: Economic summary of marine natural capital under different management options for Queenie Corner MCZ. The Net Present Value (NPV) of Queenie Corner MCZ, both as of 2019 and over the next 20 years has also been included to highlight the benefit of these management options.

Management option	Summary	Net Present Value	Net Present Value (20-yr)	Natural Capital increase due to management
Option 1	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear use throughout entire MCZ.	£1.6m	£31.39m	+£8.31m
Option 2	Prohibition of demersal mobile gear throughout the site, with the exception of 33% of mud habitat	£1.6m	£28.83m	+£5.75m
Option 3	Do nothing, only statutory monitoring to continue	£1.6m	£23.08m	£0

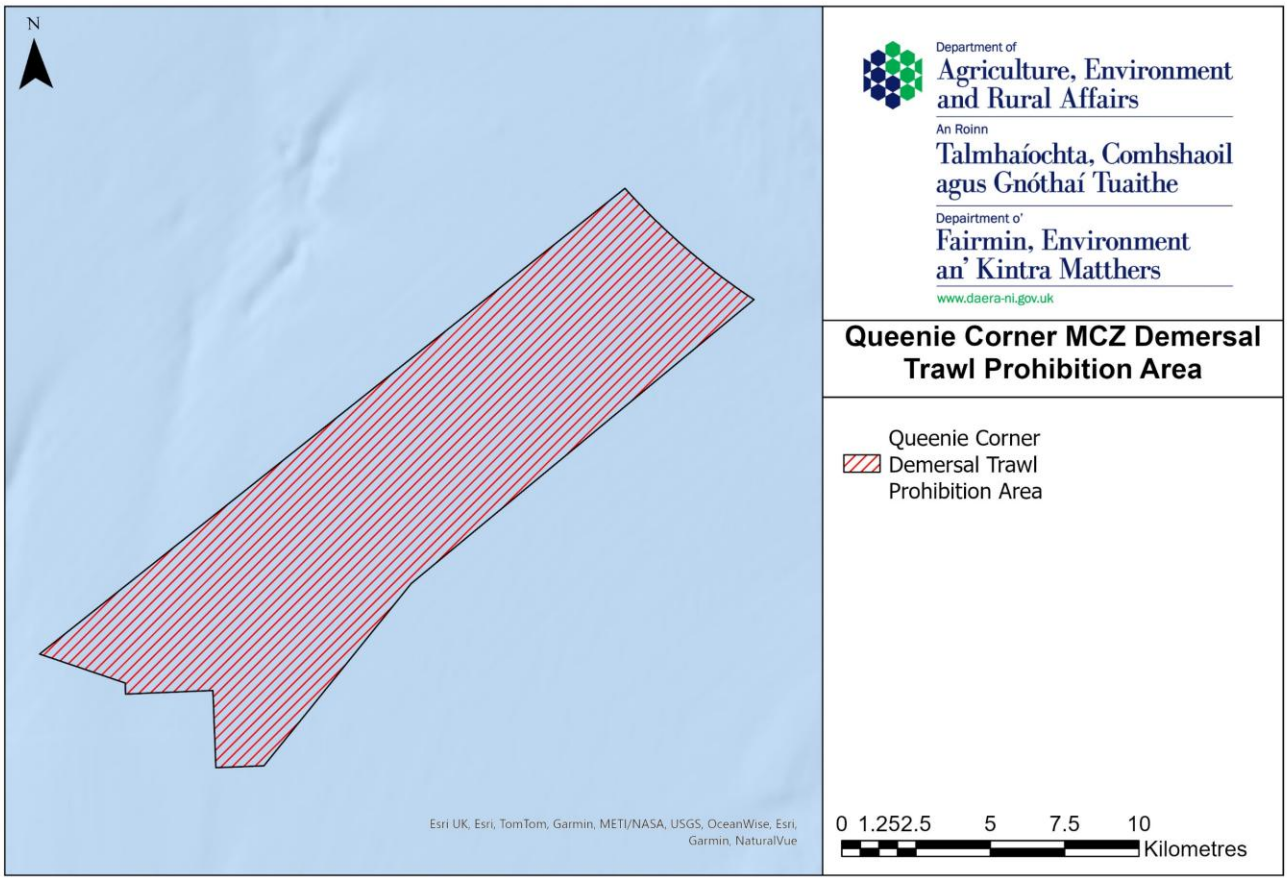

Figure 5: Map of proposed option 1, a full prohibition of demersal trawl throughout Queenie Corner MCZ.

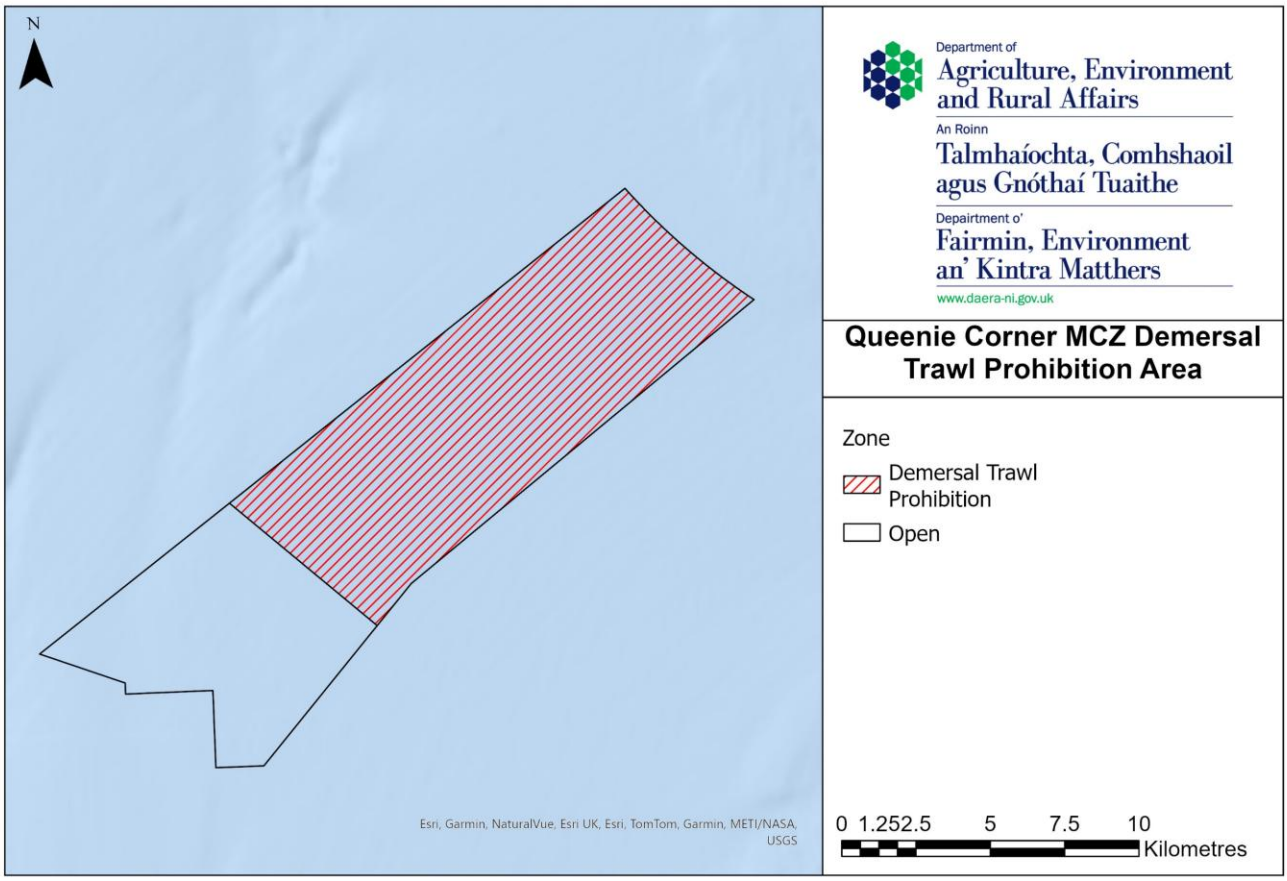

Figure 6: Map of proposed option 2, a zonal prohibition of mobile demersal trawl gear throughout Queenie Corner MCZ.

Consultation questions

Questions relating to Queenie Corner MCZ are summarised below:

6.1. Do you agree with the recommended option of a full closure? If not, what is your preferred option?

6.2. Do you agree with the assessment of the current value of fishing within Queenie Corner MCZ?

6.3. Is there any further evidence that should be considered in terms of values, costs or benefits?

To respond to these questions please see online response form.

Conclusion

As detailed above, this consultation paper sets out evidence-based management options for the development of fisheries management measures in offshore MPAs. Currently, 8.44% of the Northern Ireland zone is closed to bottom towed fishing but with the additional prohibitions proposed by the Department's preferred option in this consultation, that figure will rise to 12.82%. The proposed closures of these three offshore MPAs adhere to international duties regarding sustainable fishing and the protection of the marine environment and are applied equally by all jurisdictions. This approach to balancing fisheries management and conservation is common across all OSPAR regions and contributes to achieving 30% protection of our seas by 2030.

Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*) is the primary catch in the Northern Ireland offshore region. The quota impacts resulting from the proposed closures are not expected be significant, as at present, 1.35% of Irish Sea quota by weight – and 1.71% by value – is captured from within these three MPAs. Full quota utilisation in the Irish Sea is uncommon, with the MMO reporting quota uptakes of 74.4%, 79.1% and 89.4% for the years 2023 through 2025 respectively[41]. It is important to note that the portion of quota captured from these three MPAs will still remain available to catch in other locations of the ICES VIIa quota region. Therefore, the proposals outlined in this consultation are deemed fair, reasonable and proportionate, effectively supporting the achievement of agreed international obligations.

The Department welcomes your views on these proposed options. To respond to the questions please refer to the online response form.

[41] Quota use statistics

Annex A – Habitat Maps of Marine Protected Areas

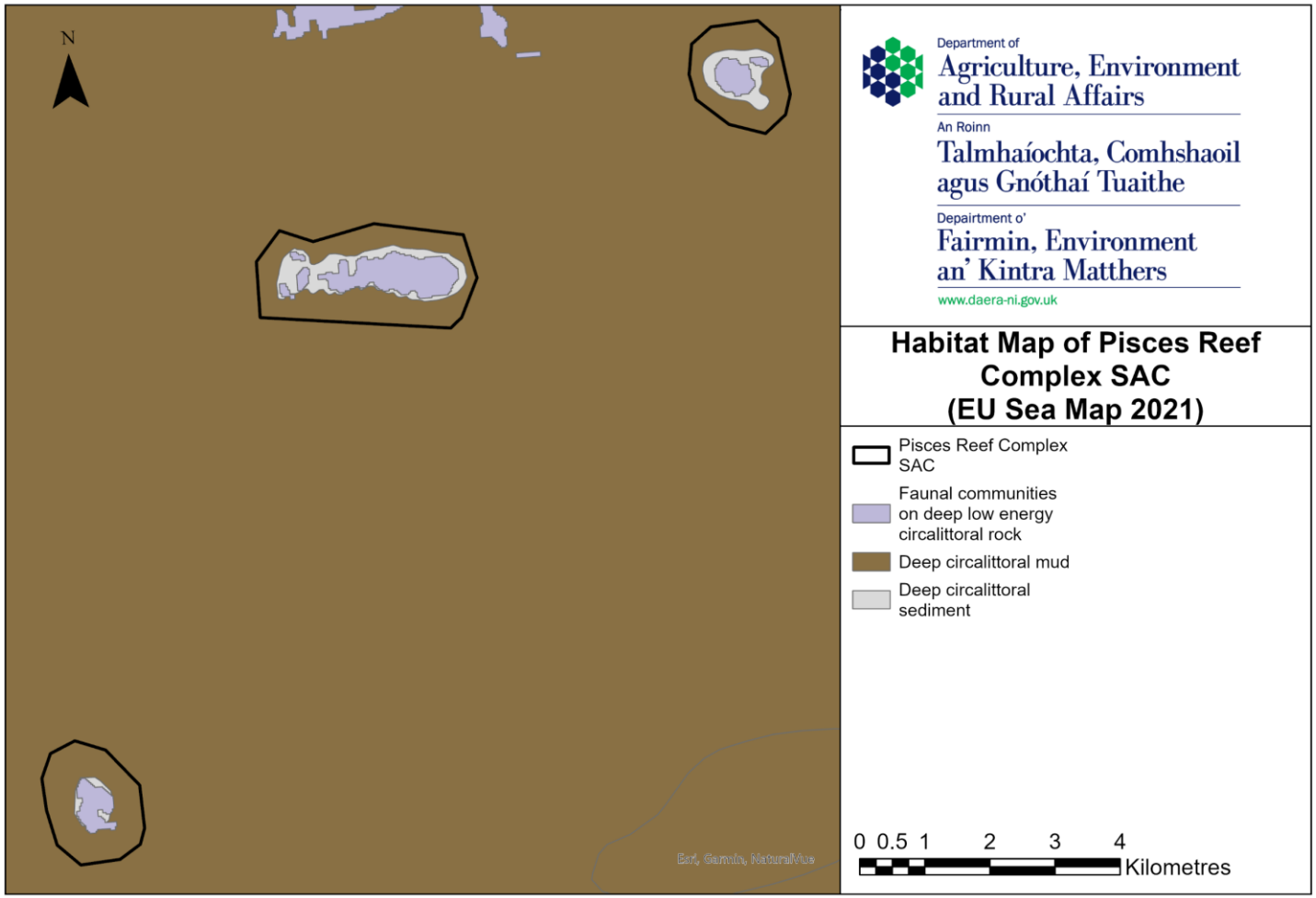

Figure A1: Pisces Reef Complex SAC Broadscale habitat map (EU Sea Map: EUNIS level 3).

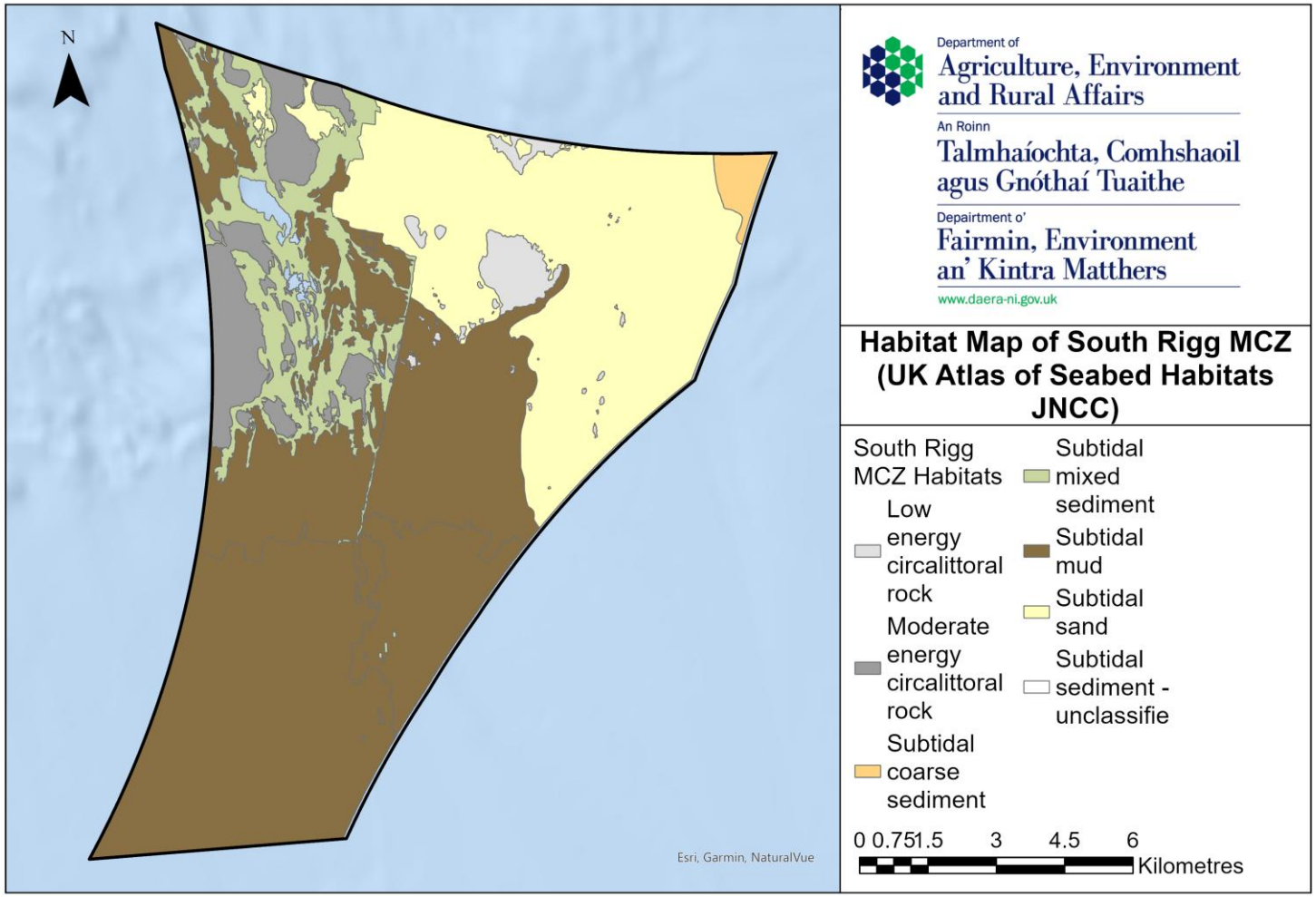

Figure A2: South Rigg MCZ feature/habitat map (UK Atlas of Seabed Habitats).

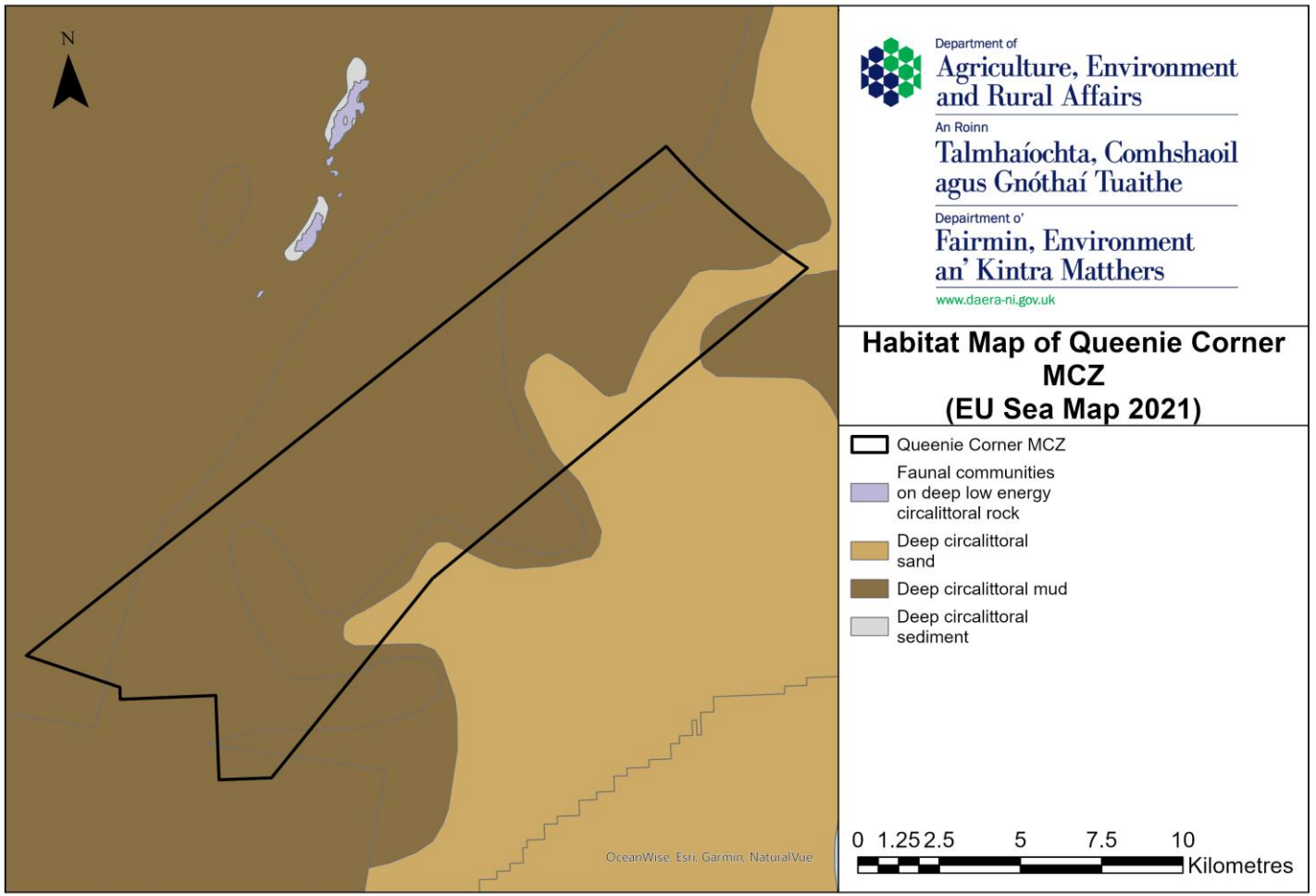

Figure A3: Queenie Corner MCZ Broadscale habitat map (EU Sea Map: EUNIS level 3)

Annex B – Assessment of the level of risk from demersal mobile gear and static gear fishing in Marine Protected Areas

Table B1: Level of risk associated with demersal mobile gear and action advised for each feature within Pisces Reef Complex SAC (based on MarESA).

MPA	Feature	Biological Pressures	Chemical Pressures	Physical Pressures	Action advised
		Level of risk	Level of risk	Level of risk	
Pisces Reef Complex SAC	Reefs	High	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.

Table B2: Level of risk associated with demersal mobile gear and action advised for each feature within South Rigg MCZ (based on MarESA).

MPA	Feature	Biological Pressures	Chemical Pressures	Physical Pressures	Action advised
		Level of risk	Level of risk	Level of risk	
South Rigg MCZ	Moderate energy circalittoral rock	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Consider changes in management.
	Subtidal coarse sediment	High	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.
	Subtidal sand	High	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.
	Subtidal mud	Moderate	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.
	Subtidal mixed sediment	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Consider changes in management.
	Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities	High	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.

Table B3: Level of risk associated with demersal mobile gear and action advised for each feature within Queenie Corner MCZ (based on MarESA).

MPA	Feature	Biological Pressures	Chemical Pressures	Physical Pressures	Action advised
		Level of risk	Level of risk	Level of risk	
Queenie Corner MCZ	Subtidal mud	Moderate	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.
	Sea-pen & burrowing megafauna communities	Moderate	High	High	Remove pressure from demersal mobile gear.

Annex C – Glossary

Adaptive Management - an approach that uses environmental feedback to refine management actions over time, reducing uncertainty through ongoing monitoring and learning.

AFBI (Agri-Food Biosciences Institute) - A non-Government Departmental Body who provides scientific advice and fisheries survey data to support the development of fisheries management measures.

Annex I Reef- A habitat type which occurs where rocky areas (bedrock or stony reef), or concretions made by marine animals, arise from the surrounding seafloor. Annex 1 habitats are protected within SACs.

Benthic Habitats - the ecological region at the lowest level of a body of water, comprising the sediment surface and sub-surface layers. Examples of benthic seabed habitats include circalittoral rock, mud, sand, coarse and mixed sediments.

BEACH Tool (NI-MANACA)- Economic tool used to assess natural capital values for marine areas to support management decisions.

Circalittoral - Deeper subtidal zone including moderate-energy rock habitats. No lower limit is defined, however, for the offshore zone it typically occurs below 50-70 metres away from the influence of wave action.

Co-Fish – This partnership brings together government bodies, researchers, environmental NGOs, and the fishing industry to enhance communication between key stakeholders relating to fisheries & conservation.

Conservation Objectives- Objectives describing desired condition for protected features within MPAs (e.g., maintain or recover).

Defra - Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - responsible for offshore marine policy and designation of offshore MPAs.

Demersal Mobile Gear - fishing equipment which is towed or dragged along the seafloor by a vessel to catch fish or shellfish living on or near the seabed.

Ecosystem Approach - defined as an approach which (a) ensures that the collective pressure of human activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) as outlined in the UK Marine Strategy, and (b) does not compromise the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes.

EIP – the **Environment Improvement Plan** is Northern Ireland's statutory long-term plan for significantly improving the natural environment, required under Schedule 2 of the Environment Act 2021. It sets out coordinated actions, targets, and strategic objectives designed to enhance air, water, and land quality; restore nature; support sustainable production; reduce waste; build a circular economy; and deliver climate resilience and net-zero emissions.

Favourable / Unfavourable Condition – Condition status describing whether protected features are currently meeting their conservation objectives.

Freedom of Information (FoI) – refers to the public's legal right to access recorded information held by public authorities. Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, individuals can request information, and organisations are required to disclose it unless a specific exemption applies.

GES – Good Environmental Status. A target for our seas within the UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) – An assessment to determine whether a proposed project might adversely impact a European site (SAC/SPA/Ramsar).

ICES VIIa - Irish Sea quota region relevant to fisheries assessments.

Inshore Region / Offshore Region - Marine waters 0–12 nautical miles (inshore) and >12 nm (offshore).

JNCC – the Joint Nature Conservation Committee is the statutory public body that advises the UK Government and the devolved administrations on UK-wide and international nature conservation.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – global biodiversity agreement adopted at the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15). It sets out four long-term goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030 aimed at halting and reversing biodiversity loss, promoting the sustainable use of nature, and achieving the global vision of "living in harmony with nature" by 2050.

Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 – legislation which provides for marine plans and MCZ in the Northern Ireland offshore region. The Act can be found here .

Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) – are designated under section 116 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 in the Northern Ireland offshore region. MCZs are designated to safeguard vulnerable or unique marine species and habitats of national importance.

Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) assessment – an assessment of potential impacts that activities could have on habitats and species protected by Marine Conservation Zones.

Marine Management Organisation (MMO)- an executive non-departmental public body of the UK Government, established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, responsible for regulating, planning, and managing marine activities.

Marine Protected Area (MPAs) – describe a geographic area of the marine environment which has been designated for specific conservation objections in relation to the features present. The ultimate aim of these sites is for long-term management to achieve sustainable use, both for marine ecosystems and associated stakeholders.

Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 - legislation that requires the UK to develop and implement a Marine Strategy to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) in UK marine waters.

MarESA - Evidence-based sensitivity assessment method for identifying feature vulnerability against an associated pressure or activity.

Nephrops norvegicus **(*Nephrops*)**- Commercial species of crustacean targeted in the Irish Sea, common names include Norway lobster, langoustine, or scampi.

Net Present Value (NPV) - A measure of natural capital value of the long-term benefits provided by natural assets, incorporating both ecological and societal gains.

OSPAR - refers to the **Oslo - Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic**. It is an agreement by relevant governments and the European Community to co-operate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

Programme for Government (PfG)- the Northern Ireland Executive's strategic plan that sets out the priorities, outcomes, and actions it intends to deliver during its mandate (2024-2027).

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) – are designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) for the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna.

Sea-pen & Burrowing Megafauna Communities - A designated feature of an MCZ which includes sensitive mud-habitat communities.

Static Gear - Non-towed fishing gear such as pots and nets.

UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS) - the overarching policy framework for managing activities in the UK marine area. It provides the basis for developing Marine Plans and guides decision-making that affects the marine environment, ensuring that such decisions contribute to sustainable development.

VMS - Vessel Monitoring System used to track and assess fishing activity through a 'ping' sent from the vessel every 2 hours.

For further information:

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